



OUR STORY

Michigan's Children

Annual Report 2021



Public policy
in the best interest
of children

A Message from President & CEO Matt Gillard

Dear Friends,

2021 challenged all of us in public service and the advocacy community to work to the best of our abilities in a time of great anxiety and loss. No person or community was spared the experience of seeing a loved one, friend or colleague succumb to Covid-19 in some way. (In Michigan alone, more than 14,000 residents died from coronavirus.) Equity gaps became cavernous for those living at the margins. Home and work life were upended for thousands by a series of school closings, interruptions and job insecurities.

Michigan's and the nation's long-standing broken child care system became a front-and-center political issue, perhaps for the first time, among leaders from across society as caregivers worried how they would stay afloat, and working parents grappled with ways to access and afford care for their children. The pandemic exacerbated a problem that even pre-pandemic cost Michigan's economy \$1 billion a year.

On a personal note, Michigan's Children rallied in our policy work to shore up social safety net programs and influence significant, once-in-a-lifetime federal and state resources to support the most vulnerable among us. The year broke our hearts in other ways. As many of you are aware, our Vice President for Programs, Michigan Corey, had battled cancer for several years, and passed away in March. Her memory, her legacy for always fighting the good fight for Michigan's children, youth and families continue to inspire us.

The work we started in 2021 was in many ways a precursor for how we will focus our efforts in 2022. We were instrumental in urging government leaders to apply \$1.4 billion in federal pandemic relief to our struggling child care system. Much more needs to be done to invest in systems to help parents, providers and children move forward. We will engage with partners and decision-makers to improve life outcomes for people in other essential areas of our policy work. Among them: quality afterschool care for schoolchildren; educational and economic support for foster youth and those who age-out of the system; neglect and abuse prevention strategies to support families in child welfare; expanded services for runaway and unhoused youth; adult education and skill-building.

As we stand today, the FY2022-23 state budget cycle is opening with over \$7 billion in unallocated state funds and federal relief. We plan to raise our voices and empower others to make decisions to address the greatest needs facing our children, youth and families in Michigan. Won't you join us?

Regards,

*Matt Gillard, President & CEO,
Michigan's Children*



Our Vision, Our Mission



We Envision a Michigan where all Children Thrive

Michigan's children, youth and families don't have highly paid lobbyists or superPACs looking out for their best interests in Lansing or Washington, DC, but they DO have all of us.

Michigan's Children is an independent voice working to reduce disparities in child outcomes from cradle to career through policy change.

We work with policy-makers, communities, other organizations and the public to improve the quality of life for children and their families and to ensure that every child in Michigan has an opportunity to become a healthy, productive and responsible adult.



Public policy
in the best interest
of children

Our Team

Staff

Matt Gillard

President & CEO

Bobby Dorigo Jones

Vice President

Kali Montgomery

Director of Administration

Teri Banas

Director of Programs and Communications

Stephen Wallace

Regional Engagement and Mobilization Associate

Madeline Elliott

Policy and Programs Associate

Board Officers

Kurt Strehlke – Chair

Bank of America

Shaun Wilson – Secretary

Cadence

Tony Stamas – Treasurer

Midland Business Alliance

Directors

Jennifer Bowman

Department of Labor and Economic
Opportunity

Kristen Kangas-Kraft

Blue Cross Shield of Michigan

Yazeed Moore

W.K. Kellogg Foundation

Terry Murphy

Retired – Certified Public
Accountant

Diana Wong

Eastern Michigan University

John Ziraldo

Commonwealth Consulting

In Memory of Michele Corey (1967-2021)

“Her Light Continues to Inspire”

The passing of Michigan’s Children’s Vice President Michele Corey on March 30, 2021 left a painful ache in the hearts of colleagues and the child and family advocate community she inspired for nearly three decades. Scores of those she knew and worked with have come forward to memorialize her as one of Michigan’s most respected and beloved champions for the most vulnerable children, youth, and families among us.

Michele Corey joined Michigan’s Children as a young professional in the late 1990s and quickly made her mark as a leading advocate and public policy expert with a driving passion to reduce disparities in child outcomes, reduce structural barriers, and improve the lives of Michigan’s underserved children and families. With a warm and engaging manner and keen intuition, she was able to connect with people and decision-makers from all areas of life, and strategically worked with lawmakers from both sides of the aisle on an array of issues. Michele strongly believed that the interests of public policy concerning children were non-partisan, and worked diligently to bring people and ideas together to improve systems and services for more equitable outcomes for all.



Michele made an indelible impact on Michigan’s Children, the organization she helped build, lead and fortify. She believed in the power of lifting up lived experiences, particularly youth voices, to make systems work better for those they served. Through her leadership, she expanded Michigan’s Children’s model KidSpeak and FamilySpeak programs, and developed varieties of listening sessions and candidate forums to ensure that the voices of those most impacted by public services were heard, valued and acted on. She trained hundreds of advocates to speak with confidence, influencing legislators and policy-makers toward better decisions.

Michele was central to the success of Michigan’s Children from an organizational perspective. For many who worked with her, she was its anchor. Her hard work and dedication helped resurrect the organization during at least two significantly dire financial episodes beginning in the early 2010s.

An indomitable force and networker, she also nurtured partner organizations and coalitions, including groups focused on foster care, kinship care, afterschool and adult education. In child welfare, she helped craft plans for Prevent Child Abuse Michigan. She secured funding for the statewide expansion of the Michigan Youth Opportunities Initiative (unique to Michigan), led passage of the state’s first Foster Care Bill of Rights, and advocated for an end to intuitional placements for children in foster care. She was on the ground floor of setting the vision and course for a statewide network and collaborative partnership that became the Michigan Afterschool Partnership. She helped steer the direction of the Michigan Association of Community and Adult Education, helping to win multi-millions in state funding for career technical education.

Michele’s memory will continue to live on and guide colleagues and future child, youth and family advocates. In 2022, Michigan’s Children and partners plan to launch a statewide child advocacy conference in her name to ensure her bright light shines on. To read tributes written by colleagues and other advocates, please turn [here](#).

Our Work, Our Impact

Child Care

Michigan's Children's continuous child care advocacy played an important role in impacting the historic wins made in child care investments on a federal and state level.

In **September**, Michigan's Children hosted an [Invest in Child Care, Invest in Michigan's Future Virtual Event](#) highlighting the child care crisis in Michigan from a parent and provider perspective, and elicited commitments from four federal legislative offices to prioritize large investments in child care in the Build Back Better Bill and beyond. Though action remains stalled on the bill itself in early 2022, legislative outreach and advocacy continue for provisions of the bill that strengthen the child care system for families, providers and its workforce.



By speaking before the Governor's Office and Legislature, we continued to help inform investments in Michigan's child care system from millions in **federal pandemic relief dollars**. A welcomed response was the Governor's announced plans to apply **\$1.4 billion in federal relief dollars** followed by Legislative support to improve the state's child care system. Newly adopted investments included stabilization and start-up grants to child care providers, expanded subsidy eligibility for families, increased payments to providers, and a plan for infant/toddler contracts for providers.

A new Child Care Issues brief, ["Building a Better Child Care System in Michigan."](#) provided data and perspective on the child care crisis and its impact on families, providers, child care teachers, and kids, offering as well concrete policy solutions informed by partners including the Council for a Strong America, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Afterschool Alliance, and the Michigan League for Public Policy. The brief was shared with policymakers, advocates and journalists covering the issue.

Throughout the year we maintained a robust **partnership** with [Think Babies Michigan](#), working with parents as well as partners at the Early Childhood Investment Corporation, the Michigan League for Public Policy, and Hope Starts Here Detroit to assist development of an early childhood communications and media strategy for the collaborative public launch in February and to help mobilize participants around promoting its policy priorities. Matt Gillard played a key role in leadership of its steering committee, and Michigan's Children provided necessary outreach support.

Michigan's Children kept a **consistent presence in in the media** for the need to invest in child care – averaging one media story a week – to fortify public awareness and pressure for child care crisis and needed public investments. Through direct outreach, events, workgroups, partnerships, and publications, Michigan's Children advocated successfully for the unprecedented child care investments that Michigan has experienced in 2021.

Early Intervention

Early On: Funding doubled for *Early On* intervention services for infants and toddlers with developmental delays, based on recommendations forged by Michigan's Children in coalition with infant/toddler advocates. This \$7 million increase, boosting annual investments to \$14 million, will help more families meet the developmental challenges of raising infants and toddlers during a time of unprecedented social, emotional, and physical development.



Kinship Care

Michigan's Children successfully advocated for the creation of a **Kinship Advisory Council and a Navigator program** within the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, leading to both programs being endorsed by the Legislature in the FY2021-22 State Budget. Additional advocacy efforts included support for the **Michigan Kinship Care Coalition's** Advocacy Day when caregivers were empowered to share their experiences directly with legislators. Michigan's Children also fought for strong recognition for needed support for caregivers in both the Governor's and State House's child welfare task force recommendations. Throughout 2021, we continued to assist the coalition in taking advantage of budget opportunities and priorities for the future. These wins were essential for building the case for additional investments and policy changes.

Foster Care

Learning that the Legislature failed to appropriate **nearly \$11 million in pandemic relief** for young adults who had aged out of foster care, as prescribed by Congress under the **Chafee program**, Michigan's Children went to work to spur the Governor's Office and Legislature to action. Nearly two-thirds of states had moved the funds to help young people from foster care with basic needs during the pandemic – including rent payments, utilities, car loans, education and food.

After nearly a year's delay, the Legislature finally acted and in the meantime the Governor's office responded to our advocacy and an outcry from affected young adults by issuing a \$1,000 stimulus check to each eligible youth (ages 23-27) in Michigan.



Adult Education and Skill Building

Michigan's Children fought for the creation of a **high-school completion pathway** in Michigan's new Futures for Frontliners program, the state-funded scholarship program that pays for essential workers to attend local community college tuition-free. This created a seamless path from high school completion to postsecondary success for qualified essential workers during the pandemic, making it possible for more people to access college and improve their financial future.

We also worked to protect funding for CTE (Career Technical Education) programs connecting adult learners with skill-building opportunities for high-demand jobs. Michigan's Children also met with key legislative offices to build support for supplemental budget investments and an equitable funding formula for every region of the adult education system.

Runaway, Homeless Youth

Besides signature support for crafting policy priorities, Michigan's Children routinely helps advocacy partners and smaller nonprofits strengthen their outreach and advocacy support including assistance for legislative advocacy days or "dome days." Among them this year was the **Michigan Network for Youth and Families' Dome Day**, held virtually, when youth experiencing homelessness (over 12,000 students in grades eight and above in 2019-20) were encouraged to speak of their experiences directly with state Lawmakers. Michigan's Children prepared a [Budget Basics report](#) seeking \$6 million in essential new funding. While the increase was not adopted, we've reinstated our advocacy to make that push in 2022 with a larger ask of \$30 million over the next three years.

What Michiganders Want: More Investments in Children

In September, Michigan's Children and The Skillman Foundation unveiled the results of [sizeable poll of 800 likely general election](#) voters that found strong public support for greater investments in Michigan's children. The project's findings were detailed before lawmakers and business and civic leaders at the [Mackinac Policy Conference](#) to encourage efforts to increase attention to the needs of children stemming from the pandemic.

Nearly two-thirds of poll participants (62 percent) said they would support more public funding for children to counter inequities and the effects of pandemic-related troubles, including disrupted learning and impaired mental health. Michigan's Children has continued to mount interest among advocates for the poll's findings through our podcast, Lunch & Learn series, news stories and direct outreach to advocacy groups with a [comprehensive advocacy packet](#).



New Strategic Planning Process

Led by Policy Associate Patrick Brown (also serving as Executive Director of the Michigan Association of Community and Adult Education), Michigan's Children undertook a months-long strategic planning process to strengthen the organization's capacity to be a policy powerhouse for kids and families. By garnering support from key partners, the board of directors, and staff, **the project resulted in an action plan into 2023** with benchmarks to chart progress along several key focus areas. Among them: Increase organizational capacity through communication, professional development, and investments in staff; strengthen partnerships and outreach to build new partnership opportunities; strengthen communication of policy initiatives; sharpen and align policies benefiting children to the organization's strategic vision; deliver quality programs that lift up and empower the voices of people with lived experiences; and improve fund development opportunities.

Lunch & Learn Programming

Michigan's Children conducted **12 Lunch & Learn programs** to engage advocates statewide with pertinent information on key topics, and to better support them with the resources they need to be successful. The virtual sessions also informed staff with new ideas and themes helpful to strengthening our communications and programming. The sessions proved to be useful tools to engage with policymakers statewide and nationally, as well. Launched in December 2020, monthly registrations ran as high as 100-plus. More than 40 percent said they attended more than one program. Among our most popular topics: *"Policymaking and the Power of Sharing Lived Experiences (May 19, 2021); "Crafting Effective Testimony with Storytelling" (April 21, 2021), and "Elevate Your Advocacy by Expanding Your Social Media Reach" (June 16, 2021).* In a survey, participants expressed their enthusiasm. "Good information. I love everything. The whole content is a valuable asset." Wrote another: "I really loved this Lunch & Learn. It was interactive and informative. Said a third: "I learned how to tell your story and how to make 'the ask' of lawmakers."



Speaking for Kids, the Podcast

Launching *Speaking for Kids, the Podcast* in April, Michigan's Children created eight once-a-month podcasts with interviews drawing from the experiences of state policymakers, advocates and those affected by important policy decisions impacting children, youth and families. In December, host Matt Gillard sat down with veteran Michigan U.S. Senator Debbie Stabenow to probe legislative wrangling over the Build Back Better Act. Other programs featured legislative reforms to the foster and kinship care systems, Michigan's drive to boost college attainment, and the need for state funding of afterschool experiences for schoolchildren. The podcast was downloaded 2,100 times. The most frequently viewed episode – "Why Michigan Needs Afterschool More than Ever" (July 23, 2021) – had 725 views.



Our Funders

Michigan's Children is able to accomplish important policy and advocacy work on behalf of children, youth and families in Michigan because of the generous contributions of these funders in 2021. With gratitude, we acknowledge:

Rollin M. Gerstacker Foundation (\$10,000)

Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation (\$50,000)

W. K. Kellogg Foundation (\$125,000)

Ethel and James Flinn Foundation (\$50,000)

Partnership for America's Children (\$6,000)

Alliance for Early Success (\$40,000)

Early Childhood Investment Corporation (\$100,000)

The Skillman Foundation (\$200,000)

